

GLOBAL NEWS

IS THE SKY FALLING?

The Geophysical Research Letters journal of 1 May 1997 (vol. 24, no. 9, pp. 1103-1106) has published an interesting paper, "Evidence for long-term cooling of the upper atmosphere in ionosonde data", written by Thomas Ulich and Esa Turunen of the geophysical observatory at Sodankylä, Finland.

The authors have found support for the theory that increased concentrations of greenhouse gases will cause a cooling of the stratosphere, mesosphere and thermosphere, causing the atmosphere to shrink. One estimate for the doubling of CO₂ was the lowering of the ionosphere (F-2 layer) by 15 to 20 kilometres.

(Source: Jim Scanlon, jscanlon@linex.com, published in *Blazing Tattles*, vol. 6, no. 6, June 1997; www.concentric.net/~blazingt)

PRIVATISING PRIVACY

The Australian federal government has added insult to injury, following its surprise reversal in March of a campaign promise to support legislation protecting personal data in private businesses.

Finance Minister John Fahey said on 25 April that the federal government would transfer computer processing of millions of tax, health, law enforcement and welfare files to the private sector. This privatisa-

tion would leave the records unprotected by any privacy requirements, because Australia's federal Privacy Act does not cover contractors. (By contrast, the Privacy Act in the USA, which covers federal agencies, also covers private contractors that process data for federal agencies.)

If the Government's plan is implemented and the Privacy Act is not amended, Australian citizens would have no right to inspect and correct 'government' files on them maintained by private contractors.

Fahey said at first that he would ensure privacy "through stringent contractual conditions", but, as the Opposition has pointed

out, only the government—not an individual—could sue for breaches of confidentiality or abuses of the records.

A few days later, Fahey said that the government would agree to extend the Privacy Act to these contractors, but critics observe that many of the prospective contractors do their data processing out the country in places like Singapore and China.

(Source: *Privacy Journal*, May '97; e-mail 5101719@mcimail.com)

US, BRITISH INTELLIGENCE BEHIND LIBYA FRAME-UP

In April 1996 *Dispatches*, the flagship current affairs program of Britain's Channel Four, presented convincing evidence that the fatal

shooting of Woman Police Constable Yvonne Fletcher, outside the Libyan People's Bureau in London in 1984, was engineered by elements of British and American intelligence as part of a Libya destabilisation campaign. The film, made by the highly regarded Fulcrum Productions, caused an uproar and was the subject of a debate in the House of Commons on 8 May 1996.

More recently, *Dispatches* has presented new information which identifies Admiral Poindexter and Colonel Oliver North as the two US individuals responsible for organising the assassination of WPC Fletcher. Shadowy members of Britain's security and intelligence apparatus are alleged to have cooperated, but they remain unidentified.

Dispatches claims that Herman Hein, a senior figure in Berlin's guns-and-dope underworld, was a principal figure operating on behalf of al-Burkan, the anti-Qadhafi terrorist group financed in part by wealthy Libyans living in exile. Hein was the linchpin for selling and shipping weapons to London.

Helmut Nagler, a Berlin weapons expert, claimed to have remodelled a special silencer for the weapon—a 9-mm Walther PPK handgun—allegedly used in the killing. He also claimed responsibility for driving the gold-coloured Mercedes to London where, at the Lancaster Hotel, he handed over his concealed cargo to a senior al-Burkan member named Zatout.

Meanwhile, Zatout remains a fugitive from German Police and is said to be



residing in the USA under government protection, according to Manfred Meyer, another Berlin underworld figure connected to the operation.

The *Dispatches* program also revealed what has long been seen as the principal motive behind the US desire to remove Qadhafi from power: oil. In 1973, Libya nationalised 51 per cent of all oil companies (mainly British, French and American) and doubled the price of its crude oil. In 1974, it nationalised three US oil companies and announced an oil embargo on the United States.

(Source: David Guyatt, david.g7@ukon-line.co.uk; also see his article, "Target Libya", in NEXUS 4/02)

IRAN IMPLICATED IN LOCKERBIE BOMB PLOT

Germany has reopened its investigation into the Lockerbie bombing because of allegations made by a senior Iranian intelligence defector who blames Iran, not Libya, for instigating the 1988 bombing.

A recent edition of the German news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, reveals that Abolhassem Mesbahi, the Iranian intelligence defector who was also an aide to former President Ali Hashemi-Rafsanjani, told German investigators that Iran was behind the terrorist bombing.

He told the Germans that Iran ordered and organised the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 as a reprisal for the USS *Vincennes'* downing of a civilian Iranian Airbus, with 290 people on board, in July 1988, just five months before.

Der Spiegel said the new details were being withheld from both the British and Americans because of disagreements over the Lockerbie 'plot', and differences between Bonn and Washington over their policy on Iran.

(Sources: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 1997; *The Guardian Weekly* [UK], 13 July 1997)

CRIMINALS FINGERED BY GENES

Numbered are the days when a burglar just wiped off incriminating fingerprints from furniture and door handles, and when gloves guaranteed protection.

Forensic scientists already routinely identify criminals using DNA obtained from blood stains, semen, hair, and even cigarette butts. But now they can identify people using DNA from the fingerprints themselves which are left on objects, even

after the prints have been wiped off.

Researchers at the Victoria Forensic Science Centre in Melbourne have successfully identified individuals from the minute quantities of DNA in their fingerprints, and were able to do this with as little as 0.5 nanograms of the material. Forensic scientist Roland van Oorschot reports it is sometimes possible to identify each of a succession of people who handled an object.

However, it is also claimed that the technique could backfire, as DNA profiles from objects handled by many people can be difficult to interpret. Investigators must take extra precautions when handling objects lest their own DNA be picked up.

Worse still, small quantities of DNA can pass from person to person when shaking hands—which means that someone else's DNA could turn up on an object they had never touched.

(Sources: *Nature*, vol. 387, 19 June 1997; *New Scientist*, 21 June 1997)

FAST FOOD, SLOW ROT

Student of science, Ben Metcalf, of Bondi Junction, Sydney, wants to congratulate McDonald's on its preservatives.

A year ago he bought a cheeseburger at a city McDonald's and decided to stash it in a drawer and observe it over time.

"Not a skerrick of mould," he reported last week. "Top-drawer stuff."

He added that although the cheeseburger

is bone-dry, it could be microwaved with a glass of water and would probably be as good as gold.

(Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Column 8, 26 May 1997)

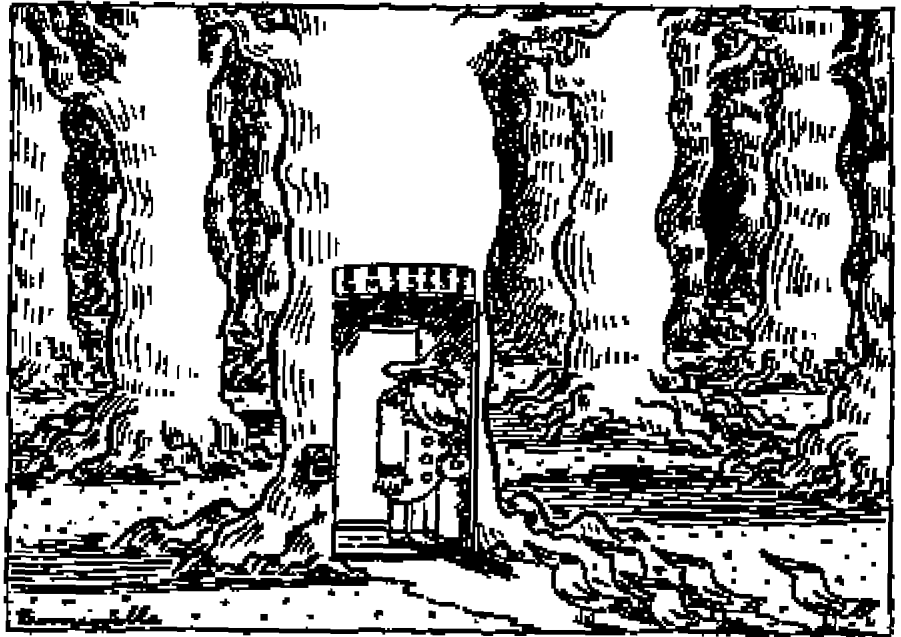
HOLOGRAPHIC BATTLEGROUND

US Congress has just approved funding for the Army to perfect a laser that projects life-sized hologram decoys of troops and tanks, designed to fool enemies on the battlefield. Dubbed the "Ghost Gun", the hologram projector could also be used to display virtual images of religious or political leaders in order to create calm or panic amongst the public.

US Army scientist Dr Gary Wood, who is leading the project at the Army Research Laboratory in Adelphi, Maryland, said: "One of the scenarios was Saddam Hussein standing on a balcony spouting pro-American messages or telling troops to lay down their arms. We are well on the way to perfecting it."

It is predicted that within 10 years many of the troops seen by enemy units on the battlefield may be no more than 3D, laser-generated images. US defence consultant Dr Brenda Mark said, "Anyone looking at the target area will think the US Army has a major presence there when in fact there will be nothing but empty space."

(Sources: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1997; *The Sunday Mail* [Brisbane], 25 May 1997)



US WAGES BIOLOGICAL WAR ON CUBA'S ORGANIC CROPS

On 21 October 1996, the pilot of an airborne Cuban Airlines plane noticed a US-registered light aircraft releasing a white or greyish mist over land in western Cuba, and immediately reported the incident to Cuban flight control.

Communications logs later revealed that the aircraft was operated by the US State Department and flew out of Patrick US Air Force Base in Florida.

On 18 December an infestation of plant-damaging thrips, previously unknown in Cuba, was discovered in a state-run potato farm. After further investigation linked the thrips' appearance to the unknown misty substance, the government concluded that Cuba had been the target of a biological attack by the USA. The next week, Cuban Foreign Affairs lodged a complaint with US interests in Havana, and received a "smoke screen" reply on 12 February.

The plague of thrips has already spread through two provinces and is rapidly moving into others, despite chemical control measures.

Is it any coincidence that Cuba is in the midst of the most comprehensive conversion from conventional agriculture to organic or semi-organic farming ever attempted? Cuban researchers and farmers are working to replace their former heavy dependence on imported farm machinery, chemicals and food, and increase their yields through animal traction, crop and pasture rotation, poly-culture, soil conservation, organic soil amendments, biological pest control and a rapidly expanding, chemical-free, urban agricultural sector.

Interestingly, the Federation of American Scientists' February 1996 Report on "claims of use or escape of agents which

constitute biological or toxin weapons" includes thrips among the invertebrates relevant to the biological weapons convention. Being highly resistant to pesticides, thrips make an ideal biological agent.

US research indicates that the insect, in its larval stage, can be dropped effectively from the height of a fumigation plane. Thrips transmit plant viruses, and with their voracious appetites are devastating to a variety of crops.

(Source: *Green Left Weekly*, 18 June 1997; *Pesticide Action Network*)

'RAY GUNS' SABOTAGE COMPUTERS AT A DISTANCE

Police and security services in the UK are increasingly worried about the potential of electronic information warfare and are working to combat the threat posed by sophisticated military technology now available on the "grey arms" market.

High-energy radio frequency (HERF) guns can jam or disable computers from a distance. Some of these HERF guns are capable of emitting pulses of electromagnetic radiation of similar strength to those given off in a nuclear blast.

Smaller, hand-held HERF guns can already be purchased for less than £1,000 (A\$2,200).

(Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May 1997)

'SMART' BULLET JUST AROUND THE CORNER

They are known as BLAMs—Barrel-Launched Adaptive Munitions—and you don't ever want to have one shot at you!

A BLAM is a new type of 'smart' bullet which can change direction during flight—a bit like a mini-missile. While a BLAM can't yet chase you around corners, it will soon be able to hit a moving target several kilometres away.

The bullet, under development at the US Air Force's Wright Laboratory in Florida, is fitted with a tiny

battery, microchip and sensor and can be programmed to follow a target illuminated by a laser beam.

The gun and the laser sight need not be in the same place, researchers say, and side winds are now longer a worry.

Military experts have successfully tested prototypes intended for use in aircraft cannon, and expect rifle and hand-held versions to be available within a few years. The estimated cost is expensive, at US\$140 per bullet.

(Sources: *The Sunday Mail*, 27 April 1997; *New Scientist*, 12 April 1997)

GETTING TOUGH ON PHTHALATES

In a move which reflects growing unease over phthalates, Denmark has introduced regulations to discourage the use of phthalates as additives to soften PVC plastic.

Phthalates are suspected of disrupting human physiology by mimicking oestrogen hormones.

The Danish measures include a phthalate tax and a compulsory labelling scheme, and follow concern over Danish scientists' findings that some types of teething rings release these chemicals into infants.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 5 July 1997; also refer to NEXUS 3/06 for "Poisonous Plastics" article by Barry Densley)

DENMARK GOING ORGANIC?

Denmark is considering banning all pesticides. The government has set up a committee of scientists and farmers' groups to decide by June 1998 whether the country should go entirely organic.

Some pesticides have already been singled out, and 150 products become illegal from July as a result of a law passed in 1995.

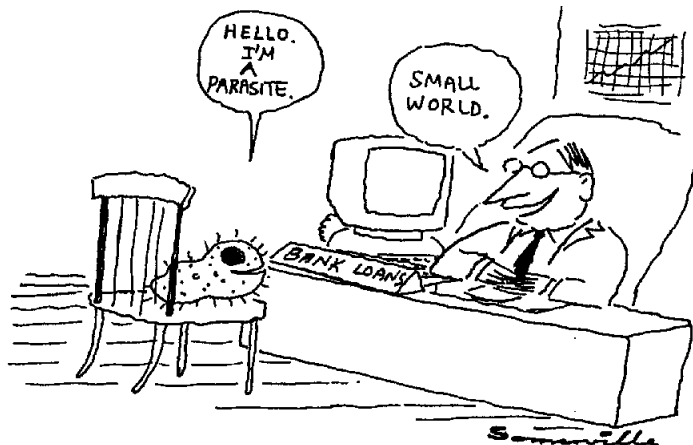
Niels Juul Jensen, deputy director of the Danish Environment Agency, says levels of pesticides are rising in the groundwater that supplies nearly all of Denmark's drinking water.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 7 June 1997)

POLLUTION/CRIME LINK

Conventional theories link crime with social, economic and psychological factors. But Roger Masters of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, UK, believes that toxic chemicals—in particular, metals in water supplies—can disrupt the neurological control mechanisms that normally inhibit violent urges.

He says that conventional theories can-



not fully explain why some counties in the US have only 100 violent crimes per 100,000 people each year, while others have over 3,000.

Masters analysed a wide range of statistics, including crime figures from the FBI and information compiled by the EPA on industrial discharges into both water and the atmosphere. He found that counties with the highest levels of lead and manganese pollution typically have crime rates three times the national average.

Masters argues that when brain chemistry is altered by exposure to toxic metals, any violent urges may be difficult to restrain. "It's the breakdown of the inhibition mechanism that's the key to violent behaviour," he claims.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 31 May 1997)

PENTAGON KEEPING QUIET ON GPS ACCURACY

Civilian users of the US military's Global Positioning System got an unexpected and tantalising treat recently. For about 19 hours on 20 April, while the US Air Force was searching for the wreckage of an A-10 ground attack aircraft missing in the Rocky Mountains, the satellite navigation system suddenly became far more accurate than usual—in fact, more accurate by a factor of 10 than the Pentagon admits it can be.

GPS satellites broadcast two signals. One signal is available to everyone with a civilian GPS receiver, which is usually able to calculate location to within 100 metres—although if signals are rebroadcast from a fixed receiver at a known location it is possible to narrow this down even more. The other signal is encrypted so that it is accessible only to the military. The Pentagon claims that military GPS receivers are accurate to within about 20 metres, even without "differential" GPS refinement.

However, Stan Huntting—author of a program called "SA Watch" which can estimate the error in GPS signals—says that, on 20 April, civilian GPS receivers were providing locations with an accuracy of as little as two metres without the help of rebroadcasting.

The US Air Force Space Command, which operates the GPS satellites, confirms that the usual intentional inaccuracy in the civilian signal—a feature known as "selective availability"—was deactivated on 20 April, but refuses to explain why.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 17 May 1997)

GULF WAR SYNDROME'S SHOCKING US TOLL

Hundreds of pages of sworn US Senate testimony show that five years after the celebrated end of a war unprecedented in its toxicity, the people of Iraq are not the only losers. What was first dismissed by the head of a special Task Force on Gulf War Health as a disorder caused by "lack of recreation" or "alcohol deprivation" has turned out to be an undiagnosable contagion striking as many as one in 10 Gulf War veterans—as well as many of their spouses and offspring.

While Washington admits that some 84,000 US veterans are sick, the Gulf War Veterans Association insists that possibly double that number are "sick, disabled or dying". Often in their mid-20s or early 30s, all casualties were in top physical condition before going to the Gulf. Today, many are exhausted after a short run or a climb upstairs on errands whose purpose they cannot remember.

Memory loss is a common complaint among sick Gulf War veterans. So is a constellation of seemingly unrelated symptoms, including night sweats, weight gain, insomnia, incontinence, rashes, diarrhoea, bleeding gums and rectums, sensitivity to light, chronic coughs, shortness of breath, hair loss, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision and blackouts.

For many Gulf War vets, the war is just beginning. In 1995, Washington raised the official death toll from 148 US combat deaths to 6,526 dead war veterans who had succumbed to a syndrome that does not officially exist.

Among hardest-hit units, three out of four spouses suffer from the same debilitating symptoms. Some wives complain that their returned husbands' sperm burns like ammonia. In November 1995 *LIFE* magazine published a shocking photo-essay depicting "The Tiny Victims of Desert Storm". Among 400 veterans' families studied by US Senate investigators, *LIFE* reported that 65 per cent of infants conceived after the war were found to have been born with grossly displaced limbs or internal organs.

Potential causes of Gulf War syndrome (GWS) are multiple and synergistic. Working upwind from large concentrations of friendly troops, coalition forces demolished four nuclear power plants and 27 chemical warfare production and storage sites. Along with extremely toxic oil smoke from 1,100 broken and burning oil wells, hundreds of tons of depleted-uranium munitions spread radioactive debris over these Middle Eastern battlefields.

Other attacks were deliberate. Early in the air war, the French Ministry of Defence detected chemical fallout—"probably neurotoxins"—in small quantities throughout the war zone. A Czech decontamination unit reported sarin and mustard gas among US positions in Saudi Arabia. The US Department of Defense spokesperson on chemical and biological weapons told Senate investigators that 14,000 chemical-warfare alarms sounded "three times a day" throughout the war. From 17 January 1991 until late the following month, more than 20 confirmed sarin and mustard gas attacks on US positions were logged by Fox 'sniffer' vehicles and litmus-wielding sergeants. Eight soldiers were decorated for detecting "chemical agent contamination"—or for their chemically-induced wounds.

The most glaring commonality among all GWS sufferers is the pyridostigmine bromide (PB) they were ordered to take three times a day. In the race to develop a successor to an earlier soman nerve agent antidote which had caused genetic damage in humans, side-effects from PB had crash-landed carefully screened US Air Force test subjects into hospitals with impaired breathing, vision, stamina and short-term memory.

A post-war US Army safety bulletin describes pyridostigmine bromide as "an unnecessary health and safety hazard to soldiers, their family members (especially children), and the general public". Many soldiers who took the small white tablets became sick immediately from an unlicensed drug that amplified the effects of sarin. US servicewomen who took birth control pills were especially vulnerable to this experimental drug. But no one was briefed on PB's known side-effects, which a manufacturer's product sheet lists as "drowsiness, dizziness or blurred vision...stomach upset, gas, headache, sweating, flushing, muscle twitching or increased tears and saliva".

The potential liability of British, American, Canadian and Australian governments—who issued PB without their troops' informed consent—could make the US\$180 million awarded to Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange look like parking-meter change. PB has been found by University of Mississippi researchers to be made many times more toxic by the stress, DEET insect repellent, lindane and caffeine familiar to desert-dwelling GIs.

The implications of bio-warfare in the Gulf could put a severe dent in the popularity of future wars. The biggest hope among ailing veterans is that coalition governments will acknowledge that something happened in the Gulf that fundamentally altered their health, personalities and lives. If they are finally heard, a dirty, secret, nearly forgotten war will become the burial ground instead of a dress rehearsal for the next germ warfare contest.

(Source: © William Thomas, wilco@mail.islandnet.com)